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OCELOT CONSERVATION FACILITY UPDATE

Following years of research and partnership involving ocelots, 2026 will mark an important milestone for ocelot conservation in Texas: the completion of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute (CKWRI) Ocelot Conservation Facility. The purpose of the Facility? To breed a source stock of ocelots that can be released to the wild in Texas. With potentially fewer than 120 wild ocelots remaining in the state, the facility will play an important role in the efforts of East Foundation and our partners to recover endangered ocelots.

Facility construction began in early 2025 following thoughtful design by East Foundation, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, CKWRI, and other partners, plus funding from anonymous donors. The facility sits on an approximately six-acre portion of CKWRI's Tio and Janell Kleberg Wildlife Research Park at

Texas A&M University-Kingsville. It will contain 16 ocelot breeding enclosures plus four outdoor "wilding" enclosures. The facility will also have a research building with quarantine enclosures,

as well as staff offices, laboratories, and veterinary spaces to support ocelot care and research.

After the facility is completed later this year, ocelots will be transferred in from U.S. zoos that have created a Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) program to support the breeding and recovery effort. Ocelots may also be obtained from wild locations in Texas or other countries in their range. To go along with live cats, wild ocelots' genetic material banked by East Foundation over the last several years in Texas will be used to artificially breed ocelots. In total, the CKWRI Ocelot Conservation Facility will enable us to house multiple ocelot pairs in one location and use various breeding techniques to successfully produce kittens.

After the birth of kittens at the facility, ocelot mothers will raise their offspring in large, semi-natural wilding enclosures that will promote natural behaviors such as exploring densely vegetated habitat and hunting live prey – all with limited human contact. Once they reach about one year old and show suitable natural behavior, facility-born ocelots with the desired genetics will be released to the proposed ocelot reintroduction area at East Foundation's San Antonio Viejo ranch. Ocelots released there will start a new ocelot population in a part of the state that has been without ocelots for decades. Additionally, facility-born ocelots could be released into the existing ocelot populations in coastal South Texas, including at East Foundation's El Sauz ranch or other appropriate locations in Kenedy, Willacy, and Cameron counties. This will provide a genetic and demographic boost to those populations.

Consistent with the need to minimize human contact with ocelots raised to be wild, the facility will not be open for public visitation. However, we will have a camera system to monitor ocelots, producing a wealth of amazing images and videos. We look forward to sharing this content along with future program updates. For now, more information on the ocelot breeding and reintroduction program and the Ocelot Conservation Facility can be found at RecoverTexasOcelots.org and ckwri.tamuk.edu/wildlife-center-facilities/ckwri-ocelot-conservation-facility. ◊

The CKWRI Ocelot Conservation Facility will be recognized as the most significant conservation effort to date as we strive to sustain the legacy of the United States ocelot. The CKWRI Ocelot Conservation Facility will provide solutions to the many needs surrounding ocelot conservation and recovery throughout South Texas. All spaces have been carefully designed with the animals' well-being and safety as the highest priority.

To learn more about this project or to make a contribution online, please visit: www.ckwri.tamuk.edu.